

O 021917Z AUG 02  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0127  
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
NSC WASHDC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
ONDCP WASHDC

UNCLAS BOGOTA 006886

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: FARC THREATS CAUSE ENTIRE TOWN TO FLEE

¶1. VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE INHABITANTS OF PUERTO ALVIRA, META DEPARTMENT, HAVE FLED BECAUSE OF THREATENED GUERRILLA ACTIONS. PUERTO ALVIRA IS ON THE BORDER BETWEEN META AND GUAVIARE DEPARTMENTS, IN SOUTHEASTERN COLOMBIA, NEAR THE EASTERN BORDER OF THE FORMER DEMILITARIZED ZONE. IN MID-JULY, AND AGAIN AT THE END OF LAST WEEK, THE 44TH FRONT OF THE FARC TOLD PUERTO ALVIRA RESIDENTS THAT PARAMILITARIES WERE MOVING INTO THE AREA, AND THAT FIGHTING IN PUERTO ALVIRA BETWEEN THE FARC AND PARAMILITARIES WAS IMMINENT. THE FARC THEN ORDERED THE INHABITANTS TO LEAVE OR BE KILLED, ACCORDING TO A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC), WHICH IS SENDING PERSONNEL TO THE AREA TO INVESTIGATE. WHEN COLOMBIAN ARMY TROOPS ARRIVED ON MONDAY, THEY DISCOVERED THAT ALL BUT FIVE FAMILIES HAD ABANDONED PUERTO ALVIRA. BOTH THE 39TH AND 44TH FRONTS OF THE FARC OPERATE IN THE AREA.

¶2. MEDIA REPORTS VARY WIDELY AS TO THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED, FROM A LOW OF 500 TO A HIGH OF 5,000. THE ICRC REPRESENTATIVE TOLD POLOFF THAT 5,000 IS DEFINITELY AN EXAGGERATION. BASED ON INFORMATION FROM CHURCH AND LOCAL OFFICIALS, THE REPRESENTATIVE ESTIMATES THAT ROUGHLY 2,000 PEOPLE FLED. THE LOCAL OFFICE OF COLOMBIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN AGREED, TELLING POLOFF THE NUMBER CANNOT BE HIGHER THAN 2,500 AT MOST. APPROXIMATELY HALF WENT TO VILLAVICENCIO, CAPITAL OF META DEPARTMENT, WHILE ANOTHER 500 OR SO FLED EAST TO MOCUARE, A NEIGHBORING TOWN THAT -- LIKE PUERTO ALVIRA -- HAS NO POLICE PRESENCE. THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE OTHER 500 OR SO PEOPLE IS A MYSTERY. NEWSPAPER EL TIEMPO REPORTS THAT THE FARC KIDNAPPED AT LEAST 35 YOUTH, STATING THE YOUTH ARE NOW GUERRILLAS. AN INFORMED GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL TOLD POLOFF THAT HE BELIEVES THE FARC ARE HOLDING CAPTIVE MANY MORE PEOPLE. AID AGENCIES ARE RUSHING TO PROVIDE FOOD AND WARM CLOTHING TO THE DISPLACED.

¶3. PUERTO ALVIRA LIES ALONG A KEY DRUG TRANSIT ROUTE, IN A REGION WITH A LONG HISTORY OF FARC-PARAMILITARY CONFLICT. ON MAY 4, 1998, PARAMILITARIES MASSACRED 19 PEOPLE IN PUERTO ALVIRA. SIMILARLY, NEARBY MAPIRIPAN WAS THE SITE OF AN AUC MASSACRE IN 1997. ALSO, IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR, THE FARC DEMANDED THAT THE PEOPLE OF MAPIRIPAN ABANDON THE TOWN. WITH THE HELP OF GOVERNMENT AND CHURCH OFFICIALS, THE CITIZENS OF MAPIRIPAN TOOK SHELTER FOR FOUR DAYS ON NEARBY RANCHES, UNTIL ARMY TROOPS ARRIVED IN MAPIRIPAN.

PATTERSON

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